

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 8, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 14:25-33

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. 27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29) For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30) saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31) "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32) If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. **33) In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

One summer when I was in college, I decided to take a trip before school started. So I packed up my tent, my bike, and loaded the car with a few supplies and a few changes of clothes and told my folks, I'd be back in a couple of weeks. I had my atlas along but wasn't exactly sure where I was going. I thought I'd like to see Canada. I don't recall all the details any more but I know I stopped in Toronto and Montreal and then headed to Nova Scotia, then headed to Cape Cod and waited a couple of days for the fog to lift so I could get a view of the ocean-- which it never did. Finally I headed to Washington DC before heading back home -- with not even enough cash in my wallet to pay the tolls around Chicago. It wasn't a very well thought out trip but amazingly enough I had fun -- well except when I couldn't remember where I parked my car in Montreal and when my tent collapsed in a rainstorm and when I had to unpack my car for the border guard as I entered back into the United States from Canada and ...

Actually as I reflect back on that experience I'm surprised I didn't have more problems than I did. I wasn't sure where I was going, I wasn't prepared for trouble, and I really didn't count the cost of my journey -- that might work for a college student on a trip but it's not a very good plan for our journey through life. But there are a lot of people who just sort of drift along without any plan or purpose and hope that it will all turn out OK in the end. Sometimes even as Christians we have a tendency to sort of drift along without a solid plan to guide us in our Christian life.

In our text Jesus -- is speaking to those who have expressed an interest in being his followers. Now at first reading Jesus' words might seem somewhat discouraging. But these words are really an encouragement to look to the Lord who enables the Christian to endure and persevere rather than trying to make it on our own.

As we go through life we're bound to encounter personal problems because of our Christianity. It may be the ridicule of friends or worse. At times the effort required to serve the Lord may seem to be too great. And our spiritual enemies, the Devil, the world and our sinful flesh are going to seem too powerful to conquer. That's why Jesus encourages us to look to him.

Look to Jesus

1. Whenever personal problems threaten
2. Whenever the effort seems to great
3. Whenever the enemy seems too powerful

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. 27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Previously Luke had told us that Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem where he intended to celebrate the Passover. The large crowds traveling with Jesus were also Passover pilgrims. Some of them had expressed a desire to become disciples of Jesus – perhaps thinking that he'd make their life in this world cheery and rosy with his many miracles.

Those who think that Christianity will ensure a perfect life in this world need to think again. Jesus painted a realistic picture for these would-be followers.

Jesus uses some very striking words and illustrations in our text – beginning with the statement that unless we hate our own life and our own family members including children, spouse and parents we are unfit to be his disciples. Surely that strikes us as extreme especially when we recall how Jesus had previously urges his followers to love all people including their enemies. We've all heard of religious sects and cults who turn their followers against family – surely Jesus wasn't one of those or was he?

Here's an example of a situation where we need to let Scripture explain Scripture to us so we don't come away with a wrong impression. Jesus made some similar comments in Matthew 10:36-38. **A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37) "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38) and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**

Jesus' words are intended to shock us into realizing that nothing including our own life is to come before him or to be more important than him. His words remind us of the first commandment – you shall have no other Gods before me – which we explain this way; we should fear, love and trust in God above all things. Anyone or anything that interferes with our fear, love and trust of God needs to set aside, rejected and hated. That would hold true even if members of our immediate family is involved.

This thought deserves a bit more comment. Jesus' command to love all stands side by side with this command to hate anything that would interfere with our relationship with him. So our hatred of these persons or things is not intended to describe all of our dealings with them and the hatred will not be the malicious evil hatred of the sinful world. If a member of our family stands in the way of our relationship with Christ we will still love that person as a member of our family. We will care deeply for them. We will be concerned about their eternal welfare and we'll do whatever we can to share the Gospel with them so they might also become the Lord's disciples – but we will not let that person stand in the way of doing the Lord's will.

An example from Jesus' dealing with his disciple Peter shows us the type of attitude that Jesus has in mind for us in situations like the ones we've been describing. It's clear that Jesus loved his disciples very much – he put up with their ignorance, their lack of humility and a host of other shortcomings. But when Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem after Jesus had told him that he would be killed by the chief priests and teachers of the law and rise again, Jesus looked at him and said, **"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** So we too will have to reject any one or anything who would try to keep us from doing God's will.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for

me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

As we look to Jesus we will at times have to endure troubles and difficulties for his sake – maybe even the opposition of those we love. But those individuals can't give us what Jesus does. He alone can provide eternal life for our soul and so we gladly hate the things of this world when they interfere with our relationship with him. Our crosses may include opposition from family and friends, from acquaintances, struggles with our own sinful flesh, persecution and mockery from the world and even our own weaknesses. Each of us will have our share of testing as we follow Jesus who carried our sins on his cross.

Jesus warns us in advance so that we do not grow weary and lose heart. He encourages us to look to him when the effort seems too great. **"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29) For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30) saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'**

Whatever we do, we are to do to the glory of God – in that way our life is like a monument to God. What a pity it would be if we did not finish this monument. It would become a monument to sinful folly and a stumbling block on the path to heaven. Just as a firm commitment of resources and effort are required for a successful building project so also anything less than a full commitment to the Lord will fail to glorify God as it should. So let's start counting our resources – what do we have that we enable us to live for the Lord and to glorify him? We don't get very far when we run into a major road block. Isaiah 64:6 reminds us: **All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.** We don't have what it takes to build that monument to the Lord with our lives.

Here's where we have to set aside our own actions – giving up everything we have – and look to Christ who provides us with his righteousness through faith. (cf. Phil 3:9) So when the effort seems impossible we look to Jesus and his righteousness and rejoice to persevere knowing that with Christ on our side we will not fail.

Jesus used another illustration to remind us of our need to look to him. **"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32) If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.** Jesus' words remind us that as his disciples we will be continually attacked by our spiritual enemies – the devil, the world and our sinful nature.

Once again when we look at our own resources our strengths and abilities we'll discover that we are outmanned. We don't have the power to overcome on our own. If a king found himself in that situation – he might try to arrange for a peace treaty. But that's not an option for the Christian – there's no way we can make peace with our enemies. And there's no way we will surrender to them or be able to escape the fight. Here's where looking to Jesus comes in once again. He perfectly defeated the Devil and his allies. His victory becomes our victory through faith.

Therefore we will set aside everything that we have and put on the full armor of God as we fight the good fight of faith. The apostle Paul reminds us of the weapons the Lord provides to us: (Ephesians 6:10-17) **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of**

evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15) and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16) In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17) Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In his great hymn of the Reformation Luther put it this way:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That has us now o'ertaken.
The old evil foe Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done;
Soon were our loss effected.
But for us fights the valiant one
Whom God himself elected.
You ask, "Who is this?" Jesus Christ it is,
The almighty Lord. And there's no other God;
He holds the field forever.

He's by our side upon the plain
With his good gifts and Spirit.
And do what they will -- Hate, steal, hurt, or kill --
Though all may be gone, Our victory is won;
The kingdom's ours forever! (CW 200, vss. 1-2, 4b)

Jesus explained the conclusion we are to reach after hearing what he has said: **In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.** If we know the cost of the building, if we realize the strength of the foe, and if we recognize our own poverty and weakness as a sinner, there are just two things for us to do – despair of our own strength and look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Jesus supplies the wealth and the strength to those who trust only in him – giving up everything we have for his sake.

As you journey through life – don't forget to plan ahead, anticipate the cost and the dangers and Look to Jesus. Amen.